

Dedication

This issue of *CRM* is dedicated to the memory of Merrill J. Mattes, longtime National Park Service historian. Best known for his books, *The Great Platte River Road* and *Platte River Road Narratives*, Mattes also served as the first site manager at Scotts Bluff National Monument (where he became friends with the pioneer photographer William Henry Jackson), was an advocate for the establishment of Fort Laramie National Historic Site, and performed as NPS Midwest Regional Historian in Omaha, Nebraska for many years. In retirement, he was a founding member of the Oregon-California Trails Association (OCTA), often being called

before them to give insightful and well-received historic talks. A library containing much of his personal collection has been dedicated by OCTA in the National Frontier Trails Center in Independence, Missouri.

Merrill Mattes perfected the study of emigrant journals, which today provide such a rich and irreplaceable record of the 19th-century westerly migrations. To quote author Gregory Franzwa in a recent eulogy, "The man could not say no to anything which would benefit trail preservation.... One thing is certain. We have lost a giant. He will not be easy to replace."

Steve Elkinton

CRM and the National Trails System

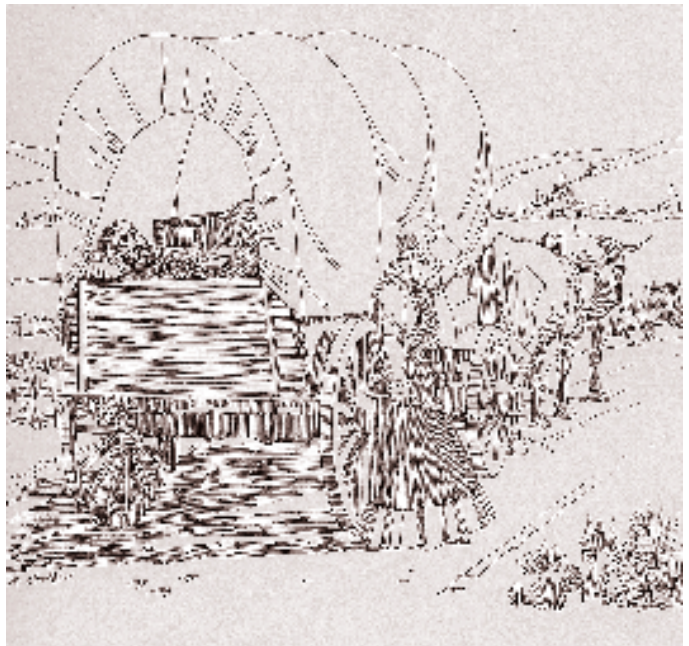
Interpretive sign illustration (created by Roger Cooke); part of the Oregon Trail sites and segments interpretive program.

One small part of the 1960s, one small concept which has taken root and flourished, one small footnote to an age of massive environmental change is the idea of a national system of trails for the United States.

Before the National Trails System Act was passed and signed into law in the last days of President Lyndon Johnson's administration in 1968, the federal government's sole interest in trails was to provide safe and convenient access across public lands: fire lanes in national forests, visitor walks at Yellowstone and Yosemite, backcountry hiking routes through remote wilderness, even marked tour routes through national battlefield parks.

With passage of the National Trails System Act (P.L. 90-543), however, the federal government took the high ground in establishing a national system of trails, in recognizing, protecting, and managing its key components, and fostering cooperation with state governments, local jurisdictions, nonprofit organizations, and even individual citizens to nurture this set of trails.

The first two trails established by the National Trails System Act in 1968 were the



Appalachian and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trails. Both had been in existence for decades, both were well known and well used, and both already enjoyed support and protection by the National Park Service and the USDA Forest Service. In fact, land use threats to the Appalachian Trail galvanized the trails community to support this legislation—however, political reality suggested that the law must establish a national system, not just protect one or two specific trails.

In 1968, Congress requested that 14 additional trails be studied for feasibility for future inclusion into the Trails System. Many of these were not primarily recreational hiking and horseback trails, but remnant routes of exploration, set-

tlement, or adventure, such as the Lewis and Clark Trail, the Oregon Trail, or the Gold Rush Trails in Alaska. As a result of those studies, and increasing public attention brought to commemorative historic routes, a new category of "national historic trail" was added to the National Trails System in 1978. In learning to administer such trails, Park Service trail managers—and their counterparts in the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service—have had to learn about the full palette of cultural resource management skills.

Federal Administration of the Trails

Since 1968, the National Park Service has taken on an ever-greater share of responsibility administering and managing long-distance trails across America. Many of the core disciplines which form the foundation for the array of professional park management skills offered by the Park Service also benefit these trails: archeology, planning, cartography, interpretation, and the full range of both natural and cultural resource management disciplines. Similar professional expertise is available in sister federal agencies. Today, the Service administers 15 of the 20 trails established as part of the National Trails System; the Bureau of Land Management administers one and the Forest Service four. Therefore, the National Trails System is truly an interagency operation. There are a number of other differences which should be mentioned between traditional public lands management and trails administration:

All trails work is a partnership. Without vibrant non-profit organizations, supportive state programs, and the assistance and recognition of local communities, it is almost impossible to bring these trails forward as real places to visit and experience.

Long distances. Few parks or forests cross state lines—but almost every trail does. Some span several NPS clusters and field areas. Keeping track of such long corridors on a regular basis is extremely challenging.

Ownership and control often lies with others. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is an exception, where almost 70% of the trail corridor is federally owned. Along most of the other trails private landownership dominates. Most trail corridor protection is therefore carried out through outreach and persuasion, not regulation.

Authorities of the National Trails System Act

The origins of this special mix of opportunities and authorities stems from the National Trails System Act itself. It outlines four steps in establishing one of these trails: a Congressional amendment requesting a feasibility study; a study conducted by a land-managing agency (usually the Park Service); an amendment establishing the trail; and a comprehensive management plan to guide the partnership of agency, state, non-profit, and individual players who are involved in making these trails a reality.

Among the Act's distinct authorities are special instructions for feasibility studies and comprehensive management plans (including inventories of significant resources), the concept of "high potential sites and segments" (the most important parts of each trail corridor), official certification of sites and segment of trail open to the public, emphasis on partnerships and volunteers, and a variety of trail corridor protection techniques, including full fee acquisition for some trails (even eminent domain for the Appalachian and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trails) as well as exchanges and transfers, donations, interagency cooperation in the disposal of lands, and an emphasis of having states and others try first.

An agency assigned to administer a trail then applies the mission and authorities from that agency's organic act to its trails work.

National Trails System

Trail	Date established	Length (in mi.)	Agency
Appalachian NST	Oct. 2, 1968	2,150	NPS
Pacific Crest NST	Oct. 2, 1968	2,608	FS
Continental Divide NST	Nov. 10, 1978	3,200	FS
Oregon NHT	Nov. 10, 1978	2,170	NPS
Mormon Pioneer NHT	Nov. 10, 1978	1,300	NPS
Lewis & Clark NHT	Nov. 10, 1978	3,700	NPS
Iditarod NHT	Nov. 10, 1978	2,300	BLM
North Country NST	March 5, 1980	3,200	NPS
Overmountain Victory NHT	Sept. 8, 1980	310	NPS
Ice Age NST	Oct. 3, 1980	1,000	NPS
Florida NST	Mar. 28, 1983	1,300	FS
Potomac Heritage NST	Mar. 28, 1983	700	NPS
Natchez Trace NST	Mar. 28, 1983	110	NPS
Nez Perce NHT (Nee-Me-Poo)	Oct. 6, 1986	1,170	FS
Santa Fe NHT	May 8, 1987	1,200	NPS
Trail of Tears NHT	Dec. 16, 1987	1,800	NPS
Juan Bautista de Anza NHT	Aug. 15, 1990	1,800	NPS
California NHT	Aug. 3, 1992	5,665	NPS
Pony Express NHT	Aug. 3, 1992	1,966	NPS
Selma to Montgomery NHT	Nov. 12, 1996	54	NPS

NST=National Scenic Trail; NHT=National Historic Trail

Some General Principles

A close study of resource management being conducted to preserve and protect these trails reveals a set of principles which underlie most of this work:

Trail resource management is done through partnerships. Often this is interagency, often public-private, often involving many parties for a single project or an ongoing, multi-year program. Without vibrant partnerships, trails wither. The backbone of trail work are committed volunteers. Over one third of all NPS VIPs (Volunteers-in-the-Parks) are associated with the Appalachian Trail—much of it devoted to resource management. Throughout the National Trails System, every federal operating dollar is matched by at least three dollars' worth of volunteer time.

Trail resource management closely links both natural and cultural resource issues. Few sections of these trails are solely natural or cultural—most are tightly bound interactions of natural settings through which prehistoric and historic travellers passed. The trail story often hinges on the interaction of people to the desert or mountain or river crossing before them. Trail resource management, therefore, must almost always be an interdisciplinary effort.

Trails resource management is innovative. The special conditions of these long, sometimes discontinuous corridors (long distances, mixes of ownership, an absence of clear boundaries, newness in the public mind) invite innovation. Traditional ways of doing resource management are often too expensive or site-specific to be useful to trails. GPS, GIS, remote sensing, computerized databases, cultural landscape management techniques and other high-tech, cutting-edge assessment and management tools may offer the only hope of accounting for and interpreting these long, fragile corridors, and making them available for public enjoyment and commemoration as envisioned when the National Trails System was originated.

Trails resource management occurs both directly and indirectly. A good trail site inventory builds credibility; it can be an opportunity to involve supportive citizens and organizations. If done poorly, distrust among trail partners grows. Eroded trails or damaged waysides indicate neglect. Therefore, along national trails, resource management does not occur in a vacuum, but has many good results if done well. Constituent organizations which advocate the trails will grow and be more supportive—especially if they are involved in the management work. Interpretation, educational events, and commemorative reenactments are as important as hands-on treatments. Visitors will benefit from good trail stories based

on sound research. Local, state, and national politicians will offer greater support for the trails if they see that trail resources are being recognized and protected, and that the public is benefitting through better interpretation.

Highlights of this Issue

The materials gathered for this "snapshot" of recent and current cultural resource work along components of the National Trails System follows a standard outline of good resource management: assessments and inventories, planning, management, and education and interpretation.

Most of the articles describe work along national historic trails, although there are many wonderful cultural resources and cultural resource challenges along national scenic trails. Some of the articles take a traditional approach, while others are provocative "thought pieces." Several authors take different perspectives on the same trail, such as Hawaii's Ala Kahakai, which is currently under study for possible inclusion in the National Trails System. The 1993 Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial has resulted in numerous studies and heightened public awareness of this important route, and some of these studies are described. Some just offer good, common-sense advice. Several articles are the result of important research or planning projects. Trails are complicated and change over time—and several authors examine both honoring the past appropriately and preparing for future change. Unfortunately, space does not allow representation of all 20 of the national trails.

Professionals from all agencies involved in the National Trails System have contributed, as well as a number of citizen partners. Also included is a description of another nation's trail system—Switzerland's—which closely parallels ours with both walking and historic route components. There is a tremendous (and largely untapped) opportunity to exchange trail corridor management ideas among many nations who are embarked on this linear conservation enterprise.

At the end of this issue are listed some of the current resources which make the National Trails System possible today: committed trails organizations, federal and state agency offices, web-sites, and publications.

Steve Elkinton, trained as a landscape architect, serves as Program Leader for National Trails System Programming, in the National Park Service's National Center for Recreation and Conservation. He assisted in assembling and editing articles for this issue of the CRM.